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EVIN PRISON RIOT

DOCUMENTATION FASCISM, IRAN UPRISING, RIOT

his is the translation of a report first published by our sister organization Manjanigh with some additional information on the history and physical structure of the Evin prison for English readers not familiar with the prison's context.

This report is one of the most detailed descriptions of the Evin prison blaze and the following riot that broke out on Oct 15th, 2022. In what follows, we first give a brief description of Evin prison's historical and political significance. We then provide a brief description of the events of Oct 15th,

followed by a more detailed elaboration of all the stages of the riot at ward 8th, the courtyard, and the following suppression of prisoners at the sports hall the next morning.

Contrary to the patronizing accounts given by profiteering “human rights” organizations, this report does not aim to victimize prisoners. Rather the prisoners involved in the riot are depicted as the brave fighters they are. Those who, despite the heavy hand of suppression, surrounded by walls of bullets, bruised by batons, sleep deprived, left thirsty, with burnt shoes and clothes, speak of Oct 15th as “one of the most beautiful nights in the Evin prison.” The night when all the forces of the oppressor (including the prison authorities, special units, Basij militia, and police forces) and their weapons could not withstand the prisoners’ will and determination. The night when the oppressor was humiliated to its core inside the walls of its own prisons. October the 15th marked Evin prison as another battlefield against tyranny in parallel to the widespread social uprising.

ABOUT EVIN

Evin is one of the largest and most notorious prisons designated for housing political prisoners with national security charges. The prison is built on 40 hectares of land located in the Evin neighborhood, in the north part of Tehran city. The prison was built during the 1960s and 1970s but first came into operation in 1972. Prior to the 1979 revolution, Evin was placed under the direct supervision and control of SAVAK (the Intelligence and Security Organization of the Shah).

The prison building initially included 20 cells and 2 communal wards, with a capacity of 320 inmates. During the following years, the prison was expanded to include more buildings, such as a special ward for political prisoners, an execution yard, a courtroom, and separate wards designated to house female inmates and non-political convicts. By 1978 (a year prior to the revolution), the number of cells increased fivefold to about 100, and the nominal capacity increased to more than 1500 people, although the number of inmates was more than double this figure. The current occupancy of Evin prison is between two and three thousand inmates, and at times of insurrection, it houses up to double that number.

Since the beginning, Evin has been among the most notorious political prisons (much worse than other large prisons). Before the revolution, inmates belonged to a diverse political spectrum opposing the Pahlavi monarchy (including different groups on the Left, Mujahid, and Islamists). Amongst the major executions carried out in this prison were that of members of the Fedayeen (The Organization of Iranian People’s Fedai Guerrillas) and two members of the Mujahideen (People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran) in 1975, on the hills behind the prison grounds. They were executed in spite of having been sentenced to prison and not given the death penalty.

Shortly after the revolution, Evin continued to house some of the same political prisoners that were sentenced during the Shah’s reign (mainly the left opposition and Mujahedin). However, it wasn’t until the infamous summer of 1988 that Evin prison became the main site of one of the largest mass executions of political dissidents in Iran’s history. Thousands of prisoners across the country accused of treason (“apostates,” “atheists,” and “sworn enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran”) were executed at Khomeini’s direct decree.

EVIN'S PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

Evin is under the supervision of the Prison Organization, a government organization operating under the control of the judiciary. However, depending on the agency responsible for the arrest, prisoners will end up in different sections and wards of Evin, which are supervised and controlled by different organizations (including the intelligence service and IRGC– the Revolutionary Guard).

The wards' structure has changed over time. Currently, the housing part includes:

Ward 325 (Cleric inmates);

Ward 240 (mostly for non-binary inmates and other temporary inmates);

Ward 2-A (political prisoners of the IRGC Intelligence Organization);

Female prisoners' ward;

Ward 4 (quarantine and defendants awaiting final sentencing);

Ward 350 (formerly political but since 2014 has turned into the workers' ward)

Wards 209 and 240: are the notorious detention centers for political prisoners and are under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence, with no connection with the judiciary and Prison Organization.

Ward 7: Mainly reserved for those convicted of financial crimes and known as the highest quality prison ward in the country. This ward includes 8 halls, each with a capacity of 200 prisoners, sometimes accommodating more than 700 prisoners in each hall. Out of these 8 halls, 7 halls are reserved for non-political prisoners, but sometimes political prisoners are also taken within.

Ward 8: This ward is known as the exile camp of the prison and is where political prisoners are kept.

OCTOBER 15TH EVIN BLAZE

The prison riot of October 15th broke out during the 5th week of the Iran uprising and should be treated as an integral part of the people's resistance. The Evin riot was a revolt against the constant humiliation, insult, and repression within the prison, which had intensified in September and early October.

This report is a testimony verified by the prisoners involved in the riot in ward 8. According to the evidence, the prison guards had an advanced plan to provoke prisoners by transferring some of them to other prisons. In response, prisoners in wards 7 and 8 organized a march during the airing break and chanted "Death to the Islamic Republic," "Death to Khamenei," and "Damned be Khomeini, Death to Khamenei." Moreover, prison guards were ordered to be on alert since the morning of October 15th. Some of the prisoners close to the ruling class were warned to "be careful in the coming days" two days before.

Though the government was stoking tensions to justify the transfer and execution of political prisoners, the rebellion against this effort forced the death squad into a defensive maneuver

against the rebels who set their prison ablaze. This collective act of resistance showed that the Islamic Republic was not safe even here. Plenty of bloodshed happened during this rebellion. Many dear lives were lost who should be remembered as martyrs of the movement. This uprising shall be remembered as a courageous act of resistance.

BACKGROUND

The immediate cause for this riot was the intensified restrictions in ward 8, exacerbating the poor conditions prisoners had already suffered.

Some of these were:

- The mandatory 5 pm curfew including the library.
- This earlier than usual curfew was placed at the beginning of the uprising as guards suspected the possibility of a riot.
- The early shutdown was particularly significant as the ward 8 building did not have safety measures, and closing the ward increased the risk of fire hazards.
- The forced transfer of some of the prisoners most vocal about the poor safety conditions in the prison to other cities, including the Rajaei-Shahr prison in Karaj. This forced transfer was used as a punishment, despite prisoners' resistance to it.
- The presence of anti-riot police in wards 7 and 8: days prior to the blaze, anti-riot guards were placed in wards 7 & 8, antagonizing prisoners by marching in the ward and shouting religious (wartime) slogans such as "Haydar Haydar" (Haydar being the nickname of the first Imam of the Shiites and used as a chant by the militia and army forces before).
- The frequent shutdown of running water (like warm water for showers) as a deliberate harassment method.

The combination of these conditions created a distressing atmosphere for the prisoners. According to the prison guards themselves, these conditions would continue as long as the street protests were ongoing. The state's inability to suppress the uprising on the streets gave prison guards a reason to compensate by suppressing the prisoners, though this backfired spectacularly.

RESISTANCE OF WARD 8

On October 15th, 2022, at around 8:30 pm, prisoners in ward 8 heard screams and gunshots from ward 7. Through the windows connecting both wards, prisoners in ward 8 could see their inmates in ward 7 being shot while fire flamed out. Ward 8 agitatedly broke the doors in their halls, chanting "Death to Khamenei" and "Death to the Islamic Republic," trying to aid Ward 7.

To avoid the flames and tear gas, prisoners tried to open the ward 8 main entrance with the help of ward 7 inmates. However, they found out that the spy/prisoner Irfan Hatami in cooperation with the ward's guard officer named Tavakoli had locked the ward 8 doors.

Once faced with this, ward 8 prisoners moved toward the courtyard door and broke it. Once ward 8 prisoners broke out of the ward into the open courtyard, they tried to light a fire to overcome the suffocating gasses caused by the intensity of tear gas. Under the bombardment of bullets, pellets, and tear gas thrown at them by the prison guards, prisoners defended themselves and, at the same time, chanted slogans against the regime. The courtyard turned into a war zone while one side was unarmed. According to the official statements, nearly 700 special forces were sent to Evin.

Due to the heavy rain of bullets and fire, ward 8 prisoners had no possibility to return to the halls. It was during this shelling of the yard and Ward 8 that Mehran Karimi was hit by a bullet in his abdomen. In the yard, the situation was more severe: Yashar Tohidi was hit in the leg, and Mohammad Khani was also hit. The intensity of the prisoners' wounds was evidence of a full-scale war against them. Apart from these, a number of other prisoners were shot by rubber bullets. Among them are Ayub Ahrari, Reza Salmanzadeh, Seyed Javad Sidi, Mehdi Vafaei, Omid Rafiei, and Mohsen Sadeghpour. During this brutal attack, the slogan "Death to the Islamic Republic" did not stop for a moment while the prisoners were facing death.

Finally, when the special unit, the guard officers, and the head of the 8th ward (Colonel Mahmoudi) entered the yard, the prisoners in the yard, who were taking care of their injured friends and had taken shelter from the rain of bullets under a small roof in the yard, had to surrender and were laid on the ground.

The security forces were extremely infuriated. Their authority was severely undermined, and the slogans of the prisoners had wounded their pride. The rain of bullets had now given place to the rain of insults and humiliation and batons. They beat the heads, hands, and feet of the prisoners and insulted them. The intensity of the clashes was such that some agents of the special unit prevented the others from clashing with prisoners. In one of the most brutal encounters, Colonel Mahmoudi, the head of the 8th ward, insulted Arash Johari and hit him hard with a baton on his head, causing his head to break and bleed so that his vision was impaired for at least 3 to 4 hours. The cruelty of Colonel Mahmoudi against Johari was because Johari had been among the vocal prisoners advocating for his fellow inmates before.

The rest of the prisoners were not spared from the brutal beating of Mahmoudi and his officers. The prisoners' bodies were hit by batons, but they did not show any sign of regret. This group of prisoners included Amir Abbas Azarmvand, Meytham Dehbanzadeh, Mojtaba Tavakol, Mohammad Irannejad, Ayub Ahrari, Pouria Mazroub, Yashardar Dar Al-Shafa, Kaveh Dar Al-Shafa, Adel Gorji, Abolfazl Nejadfath, Ismail Gerami, Loqman Aminpour, Mohsen Sadeghpour, and many more.

THE STATE OF THE HALLS

After the initial suppression, the prison guards continued to fire tear gas in the halls to gain back full control. The prisoners inside the halls had no choice but to reach the kitchen and breathe through the windows. Around 2:00 pm, Colonel Mahmoudi enters with some of his special units and shouts at the prisoners through the loudspeakers. He also enters the rooms with his shoes

on and angrily tears the curtains and breaks the air conditioner, TV, and some furniture. In response to the question of prisoners about the state of their comrades in the yard, he says: "all of them are being perished." In this situation, with blood covering the yard, the remaining prisoners are left in a mental and emotional conundrum, believing that some of their comrades have been killed. The morning after the hellish night of October 15th, Karbalaie, the substitute officer, entered the prison with a special unit and began threatening and abusing the prisoners. In response, some prisoners bravely stood in front of him, laughing and mocking him. Guards brutally beat these prisoners and took them outside of the ward to join the other chained prisoners in the yard. This group of prisoners included Hojatullah Rafei, Mehdi Savaralia, Parsa Golshani, and Mehdi Abbaspour.

SPORTS HALL EVENTS

At the end of the riot, ward 8 prisoners who were chained in the yard were sent to the common gym of the 7th and 8th wards with bare feet, as their slippers were thrown into the fire by the special unit. The image of the detainees in this hall is comparable to the events of the Chilean sports stadium during the Pinochet coup. More than a thousand prisoners with bloody faces and hands over their heads were huddled together in groups. Nearly 60 rebels from ward 8 and about 1,600-1,800 rebels from ward 7 had filled the hall.

The special unit, armed with batons, was patrolling among the prisoners, and every now and then, they would hit someone and insult them. This atmosphere was similar to a chicken coop where butchers parade with their butcher knives. Then, officers used plastic as well as metal handcuffs to tie prisoners. During this process, insults and beatings would continue and not stop for a second. But this was not the whole story. Remarkable scenes of resistance continued to shine through the darkness of the prison: the ward 8 prisoners sent greetings to their ward 7 comrades and congratulated them for creating this epic night. Despite the presence of the repressive units, ward 8 prisoners started to clap for ward 7, infuriating the guards. Having witnessed a fellow prisoner being beaten to death, prisoners continue to demand their freedom and an end to the government's oppression. Guards could not believe after the continuous beatings, shooting, and blaze, prisoners, continued to resist and challenge them.

There was no end to the antics. The sleepless officers vented their anger on the prisoners. In one instance, guards continuously slapped a young man whose "crime" was that he was Afghan. Prisoners were denied water, and the onslaught of thirst made the situation more difficult. The smell of breath, cigarettes, and sweat made breathing even harder. Executioners came among the prisoners with bottles of water, and the cracked lips opened to catch a sip of water being poured into the air. At midnight, water bottles turn yellow as they're filled with urine, the smell of which now fills the air. Anyone who falls asleep for a moment would be woken up with a baton and yelled at: "You kept us awake; you must stay awake." At that moment, a smile sits on the lips of the prisoners: "We made them sleepless; long live us."

In the morning, the head of the Evin prison, Farzadi, shows up with a delegation of government officials (from the head of the Prisons Organization and the Judiciary). As a reward for their

resistance, the prisoners had their ankles cuffed during this visit. Chained up, bruised, and with bare feet, prisoners are packed onto a bus to be transferred to other prisons. The disheveled guards, burnt buildings, and desperate authorities put a smile of satisfaction on prisoners' faces: This was the most beautiful night of Evin.

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